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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001574

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA'S VOTER SYSTEM: RIPE FOR FRAUD?

REF: A. LA PAZ 1529  
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 560  
[1](#)C. LA PAZ 485  
[1](#)D. LA PAZ 120  
[1](#)E. LA PAZ 46

Classified By: A/EcoPol Chief Brian Quigley for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The National Electoral Court is facing strong opposition criticism concerning its ability to effectively organize and implement the August 10 Referendum. Plagued with internal tensions and coordination problems with the National Police and scandals over discrepancies in the national voters' registry, there are concerns that the electoral system is vulnerable to fraud. End Summary.

#### Electoral Court System ) Background

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[1](#)2. (U) The Bolivian electoral system consists of a National Electoral Court (CNE) and nine departmental electoral courts. They are in charge of organizing and executing elections. After serious allegations of fraud in a 1989 election, the CNE underwent reforms in 1991 to recover its credibility as a respected and impartial national institution. As the seven CNE magistrates traditionally represented political parties, the reforms pushed the institution away from political representations. The reformed CNE is made of five ostensibly non-partisan members, four of which are selected by Congress and one by the President.

#### Problems Within The CNE

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[1](#)3. (C) Today's CNE only has three members. Congress selected two members and has been unable to agree on two additional ones. The current CNE President, Jose Luis Exeni, was appointed by President Morales in January 2008. According to former CNE President Salvador Romero, Exeni committed two grave errors early in his presidency as he appointed two outsiders ) with no CNE experience - to two key CNE positions: the Director of Informational System and the Administrative Director. This created tensions within CNE as careerist staff resented the President's selection of inexperienced outsiders.

14. (C) There are also tensions between CNE and its departmental electoral courts, especially in Santa Cruz, Beni Pando and Tarija departments (states). In January, Santa Cruz produced a voters, petition to organize a referendum and Exeni refused to look at it, which some argue revealed his partiality and hurt the CNE's credibility as a non-partisan institution. This event marked a rupture between the departments and the national electoral court and continuous suspicion of each other. Santa Cruz conducted an audit of its voters, registry to expose the irregularities and to make a statement that CNE is not doing its job. The CNE blames the National Police and prior governments/CNEs for the irregularities.

#### Lack of Coordination in Voter Registration

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15. (U) In 2002, the CNE, with USAID support, launched a nationwide birth certificate campaign and is entering data in its computerized system, SIRENA (sistema de registro nacional). Since 2005, there is also a Free ID program, funded by Venezuela, to issue ID cards to people with limited resources. The Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) also funds a rural voter registration project in three departments (Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, and Potosi). These programs help explain the consistent growth in the voter registry since 2002 (i.e. registry grew by 300,000 from 2004 and 2006, and grew by another 300,000 from 2006 to 2008). A birth certificate or ID card is required to register to vote. The National Police are responsible for registering and issuing voter ID cards, however, they do not have access to a computerized system to verify that someone is already registered.

16. (C) The lack of coordination between the CNE and the police explains the discrepancies found in the voter registry ) ID duplicates, minors registered, homonyms, foreigners registered, etc. The 9 departmental courts found a total of 35,502 electoral irregularities last week. The political opposition argues that the significant discrepancies aggravate the lack of credibility in the August 10th referendum and the electoral system. CEELA (Council of Electoral Exports of Latin America) is currently working on verifying the national electoral registry by harmonizing names from the civil registry and the Free ID program. Former CNE President Oscar Hassenteufel told Emboff that he believes the current media scandals over discrepancies in electoral registry are creating needless problems as everything will be fixed ) all duplicates removed ) by August 10th. The national system flags duplicated names, however, the names must be removed manually.

#### CNE ) a Fair Arbitrator for the Referendum?

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17. (C) The loss of trust in CNE and the internal conflicts between the departmental and national electoral courts may undermine the credibility of referendum results. According to Salvador Romero, the recent scandals make it difficult "to determine to what extent CNE has lost its independence." Romero said that Exeni continues to follow discourse that CNE is politically impartial, but they are "empty words that no one believes. There is no faith in the referee; it is difficult to play with a referee that is considered biased." There are allegations that the current electoral system is unsecured. However, Oscar Hassenteufel argued that the current system, developed in accordance with the 1991 reforms, is sufficiently sophisticated to eliminate the possibility of fraud. There are 9 ACTAS (computerized security systems) to ensure that each voting station is providing the expected number of ballots. If there are discrepancies, then the votes are annulled and the specific voting station has to conduct a new vote within 15 days.

#### Comment

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18. (C) The lack of credibility in the CNE's voter registration system will lead to allegations of fraud - regardless of the outcome - in the August 10 Referendum. The opposition has seized on the irregularities to denounce fraud. Meanwhile, the CNE and the National Police point the finger at each other, with officials from both organizations admitting there are mistakes. Whether outright fraud or just sloppy work, serious questions remain as to the integrity of the voter registration process. End Comment.  
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